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BOOKS as sources of knowledge or of pleasure, worthy of fine editions and beautiful bindings — this is the motif of the following pages. The great histories, memoirs, classics of prose and verse, many in the great and best editions, all in creditable form, are here briefly mentioned and passed in review. Some few rare or antiquarian volumes, first editions and purely collector's works there are, but more are represented those substantial works of general interest, valuable additions to one's library — and many dainty volumes, with exquisite illustrations and beautiful bindings, suggest the holiday times.

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Notes by Mr. L. Manouk relative to

An Armenian Manuscript Book of Hymns

Consisting of 466 pages, on classic parchment, size 9½ x 8½ inches, supposed to have been executed prior to 1000 A. D.

IN reference to this book, I will first try to give a period in Armenian history which will enable the reader to form some idea of its antiquity and value as a manuscript in connection with Christ.

It is a fact that the Armenians were the first nationality to embrace Christianity during Christ's life. History as well as the New Testament gives ample proof for the above statement. During Christ's life the Armenian king, Apgar, falls sick, and every effort to cure him fails. One night he dreams that the only way for cure is to believe in the teachings of Christ. He therefore sends word to Christ that he believes that the only cure for him is through Him, but is unable to see and touch His almighty hand, as he lies sick in bed. After receiving the word Christ sends his Tateos disciple and cures him. After his recovery the king makes a proclamation throughout Armenia and the neighboring nations to embrace Christianity. It is thus that the Armenians become Christian as a whole nationality. The book itself is a masterpiece both in ecclesiastic literature and art of those olden times. One need not know or speak the language to behold the evenness, accuracy and gracefulness of the writing which has probably taken half the lifetime of a monk to produce such a work. It was the custom of the Armenian monks, in about 1000 A. D., to devote or give their time, according to their talents, to some service to God. It is to this end that the artist monk has produced this book, which we may call a masterpiece in this rare line. I say this because I admit that there are two or three copies of similar books in a few national libraries in Europe, of which I have personally seen the one in Paris (Bibliothique National), but even an ordinary lover of art could see the superiority of this copy.

In the year 1700 A. D. a certain Manoog Agha, then head of the Armenian church in Smyrna, goes to Jerusalem to visit the head patriarch of his church. There, after receiving the honors due to his position, he is presented with the present book and a painting on copper; the latter, which was the work of a celebrated Italian artist, being dark, does not suit his uncultivated taste, so he orders a new and bright painting of some saints to be painted on the back of it. After the death of said Manoog the picture falls into more fortunate hands, that sees the fineness of the dark figure of Christ, which has been slightly soiled, and after the necessary treatment brings to light, as previously mentioned, the work of a most celebrated Italian artist.

I give this little anecdote of the painting to illustrate to what extent this rare manuscript was considered even in those early days. In regard to the binding of the book, I will say that it is comparatively new to the manuscript itself. This can be readily seen in examining the leather and other parts of the binding, and moreover with a small part of the book (consisting of about half a dozen pages) which has been inserted either to fill a missing space or to add a new part to the book. This small space which I referred to bears also testimony of its recentness of the binding, as the papers used bear the mark of an early Italian paper factory. Another proof of the antiquity of the book is well illustrated in some of the pictures and ornaments of the book. For instance, on the first page, opposite the first picture of David, you will see a small piece of art, consisting of the commencement of a certain phrase: the characters in this are in the form of birds' heads and fishes' tails, a specimen so freely used in early Persian and Hindoo art. You will find these ornaments of art more or less nearly on every page, which makes this book interesting to every leaf of fine parchment.

I will here describe how the Armenians come to possess such fine art in reference to their Christian church. It is through the fact that their church has been the sole and only element to keep their unity and existence. From their earliest days of their history we will notice that their kingdom has been a series of falls and ups, sometimes raided by Persians and nearly wiped out of existence, and other times opposing the powerful Kingdom of Rome. Their form of government has so often changed that, were it not to the strong belief of their church, it would be hard to trace a nation so oppressed to this very day; but as I aforesaid, through their church, they come to the present era as a nation, having preserved their religion, history and traditions, so it is not surprising to hear about the oppression of Armenians in Asia Minor, the massacres, outrages and other cruelties perpetrated by the Turks, merely on account of their Christian belief and their persistence not to abandon their church.

L. H. MANOUK.

Catalogue Item.

An Armenian Manuscript Book of Hymns. 466 pages; size 9½ by 8½ inches, inscribed on classic parchment, with many miniatures, marginal decorations and illuminations in colors. Estimated prior to 1000 A. D. With six pages on paper of later date. Bound in old full leather of some moderate antiquity. Price, $125.00.

[See reverse] The characters of birds' heads and fishes' tails in the above reproduction, freely translated, read:

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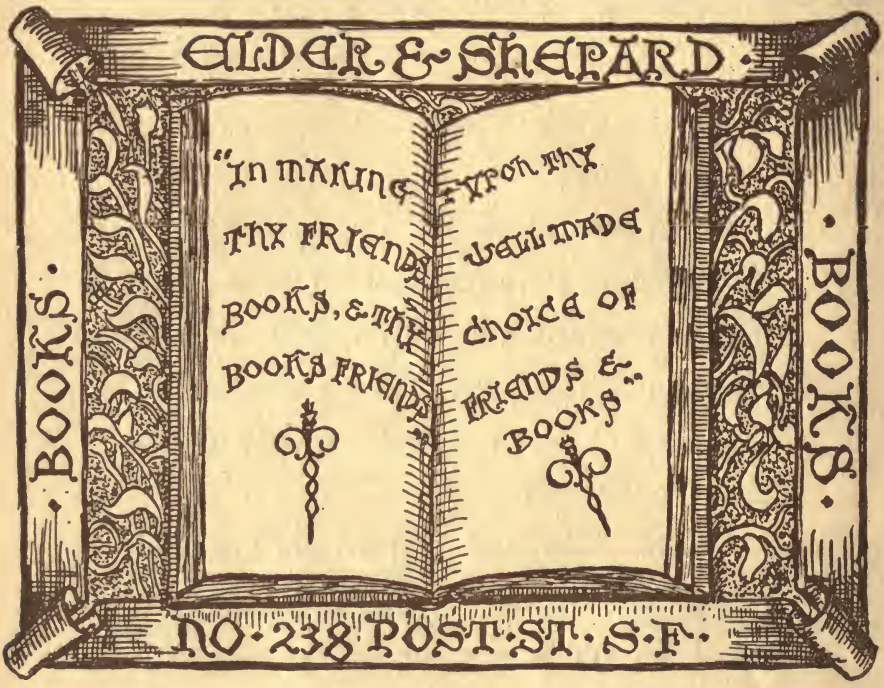
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